



WESTERN NEWS

Libby MT 59923

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How much?

The Senate, predictably, failed to move a proposal forward providing relief for corporations facing seemingly endless asbestos litigation and creating a medical trust for asbestos victims.

The atmosphere surrounding this issue might be too politically charged to handle until after the November elections. And the order of business might be a bit out of line. Perhaps we should consider banning future use and production of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials before we absolve corporations of any responsibility.

The Fairness in Asbestos Injury Resolution Act contained language banning asbestos but there's no guarantee it will survive. After all, we're talking Washington, D.C., where the almighty campaign contribution is worth more than the public's safety.

In general, the sticky point remains the amount of money being made available for the health care of victims suffering from asbestos-related disease.

That issue will be discussed Friday in Libby when the governor meets with a health study group at the hospital. Through a grant, an actuary has been collecting data to determine mortality rates and long-term health care for Libby asbestos victims.

That information could prove to be invaluable to Senators Conrad Burns and Max Baucus, who both expressed concerns with FAIR's criteria and health benefits.

The how much question has been discussed since shortly after the EPA responded to Libby in 1999. It would be interesting to note how many Libby victims have died during the four-year period and how much medical debt did they incur. — Roger Morris